

PASS ON PAMPHLETS.

**No. 9.
Id.**

The New Religion

ROBERT BLATCHFORD

**THE CLARION PRESS,
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THE NEW RELIGION.

By ROBERT BLATCHFORD.

It would be easier to say what the people need than what they desire. Many of them would ask for more wages, many for shorter hours of work, not a few for better racing "tips," or more beer.

Go amongst the masses of the poor in our crowded Lancashire and Yorkshire towns, and ask them what they wish for. The men will say "a living wage," or "an eight hours day"; the wives—poor drudges!—will tell wistfully of how their work is never done, of the struggle they have to make both ends meet. A little more money, a little more ease, a little more pleasure of their hard and jaded lives—these things they desire, and would be unreasonably grateful for. But speaking of the workers in the mass, I cannot, of my own knowledge, report the existence of any earnest and efficient desire for the attainment by all of the best that human life can yield. The more prosperous workers are without heed; the more penurious are without hope. In both cases the fact is due less to lack of noble impulse or of native sense than to lack of knowledge. Show the more successful workers the truth about our social system, and they are just enough and generous enough, ay, and wise enough, to wish to right it. Show the crushed and miserable poor that their suffering and debasement are not inevitable; show them that they have just claims to a better life, and sure means for its attainment, and they will prove that they possess the courage and the intelligence to fight and win.

Half a century ago Carlyle described most vividly and truly the state of mind of the working masses :

Thus these poor Manchester manual workers mean only, by fair day's wages for fair day's work, certain coins of money adequate to keep them living—in return for their work, such modicum of food, clothes, and fuel as will enable them to continue their work itself! They as yet clamour for no more; the rest, still inarticulate, cannot shape itself into a demand at all, and only lies in them as a dumb wish; perhaps only, still more inarticulate, as a dumb, altogether unconscious, want.

Twenty years ago that passage was still literally true of all the masses. To-day it is true of the majority. But there are signs of change.

There is now a party of progress; and, which is of more value and significance than the existence of any party, there is, blazing or smouldering amongst our densely-populated districts, a new enthusiasm: almost a new religion.

The party, indeed, can hardly claim the name of party yet. It is scattered, it is badly organised, it consists of many and somewhat incongruous elements, resembling more a number of isolated clans in revolt than a unanimous people banded for revolution. Its rise has been sudden, its growth rapid: so rapid, indeed, has been its growth, and so completely has it severed itself from all established political, religious, economic, and social ideas and methods, that as yet its significance has not been realised nor its principles understood by Aristocracy, Plutocracy, or Democracy, by Church, or Press, or Parliament. To the misgovernors and misleaders of the people the new party is an insignificant mob of ignorant men, led by a few self-seeking demagogues; to the Tories it is a mere effervescence of malcontent Radicals and windy Socialists; to the Liberals it is a "Tory dodge." To those who are in the party, and have helped to make it, it is a vast and increasing army of educated, alert, and resolute reformers, who can neither be in-

timidated, nor cajoled, nor bribed to turn aside from the task they have undertaken—the task of securing to the British people the possession, control, and enjoyment of their own country and their own lives.

A few years ago Socialism was despised and rejected of men. Now it is on all lips and pens. It is written about, argued about, spoken about, and preached about. It is the foremost topic of discussion the country through. It is even recognised and sometimes acknowledged by its opponents as a thing not wholly dependent upon madness or dishonesty for its inculcation, nor upon bombs and bludgeons for its accomplishment. It has passed through the stages of contempt and vilification, and has entered the stage of discussion. It has a literature of its own, and a Press of its own. The *Clarion*, which is the first Socialist paper that ever paid its way in this country, has a circulation of nearly 84,000.

So much for the New Party. Now of the new religion. Whence came it? What is it? If you asked a London Socialist for the origin of the new movement he would refer you to Karl Marx and other German Socialists. But so far as the mass of the people are concerned I am convinced that beyond the mere outline of State Socialism Karl Marx and his countrymen have had but little influence. No; the new movement here; the new religion, which is Socialism, and something more than Socialism, is more largely the result of the labours of Darwin, Carlyle, Ruskin, Dickens, Thoreau, and Walt Whitman.

It is from these men that the people have caught the message of love and justice, of liberty and peace, of culture and simplicity, and of holiness and beauty of life. This new religion which is rousing and revivifying the masses is something much higher and much greater than a wage question, an hours question, or a franchise question, based though it be upon those things; it is something more than a mere system of scientific government, something more than an economic theory, something more even than political or industrial liberty, though it embraces all these. It is a religion

of manhood and womanhood, of sweetness and of light. As John Trevor said in the *Labour Prophet*: "It has not been to a new economic theory merely that these converts have been introduced. It has been to a new life. Their eyes shine with the gladness of a new birth."

For this we are indebted to the idol-breaking of Carlyle, to the ideal-making of Ruskin, and to the trumpet-tongued proclamation by the titanic Whitman of the great message of true Democracy and the brave and sweet comradeship of the natural life—of the stainless, virile, thorough human life, lived out boldly and frankly in the open air and under the eyes of God.

Now I see the secret of the making of the best persons.

It is to grow in the open air and to eat and sleep with the earth.

To love each other as brothers and sisters, and to love the earth as the mother of us all, that is part of our new religion. Our new religion tears the old dogmas to tatters, hurls the old Baals in the dust, declares much of that which the economists call "wealth" to be the same thing that Ruskin calls "illth." Our new religion turns its back upon religious symbolisms and ceremonies and display, and teaches us that love and mercy and art are the highest forms of worship. Our new religion claims man back to freedom from commercial and industrial vassalage; tells him that he is as much a piece of Nature as the birds of the air or the lilies of the field; that he, no more than they, can be healthy or fair, nor in anywise complete, without fresh air and pure water and sunshine and peace; tells him that since he above all his kindred of earth and sea is endowed with spirit, so must that spirit be nourished and kept sweet by spiritual sustenance and spiritual effort, else will it inevitably become corrupt and breed disease, contagion: death.

Our new religion tells him that the body must be nourished that the soul may thrive, and that nothing which is got at the soul's expense is cheap, nor any-

thing which is needful for the glory and uplifting of the soul dear :

All parts away for the progress of souls, all religion, all solid things, arts, governments—all that was or is apparent upon this globe or any globe falls into niches and corners before the procession of souls along the grand roads of the universe.

There is no way for the body to be healthy, no room for the soul to breathe and expand, in the slums, in the factories, in the markets and exchanges, the drinking kens and casinos, the political clubs and bethels of our great industrial towns. Therefore the great industrial towns and the competitive-commercial system which produced them are anathema to us, and our religion bans them.

We all know the institutions and the ideals upon which Carlyle and Ruskin and Dickens and Thackeray poured out the vials of their irony and scorn. We all know the great Westminster wind-mill, where ignorant educated men grind wind with which to fill the bellies of the hapless workers. We all know how those illustrious legislators, when the people ask for bread, spend months and even years in debating as to whether or not it would be rash to offer them a stone. We all know the ragged Falstaffian army of the Press, "without drill, uniform, captaincy, or billet; with huge *over*-proportion of drummers; you would say, a regiment gone wholly to the drum, with hardly a sound musket in it." We all know the champion ineptitude, the adroitest of all political mountebanks at swallowing words and juggling figures, the "poor forked radish" who is raised upon the bucklers by the proverbial twenty-seven millions, as "the triumphant outcome of English history, and fittest man to rule over us." We all know Bobus of Houndsditch, Plugson of Undershot, and Messrs. Bounderly, Gradgrind, Podsnap, and Co. We know these men, and the things they profess, and call by the names of "political economy," "practical common sense," and "religion."

We will have no more of these Dead Sea apes nor of their heroes, nor of their creeds, nor of their aspirations. Never, surely, since the world went round has it harboured a race of such mean, vulgar, and impossible little infidelities as the British Snobocracy with their gospel of "enlightened selfishness."

A whole nation ordered, or rather disordered, on the supposition that if every man were free to rob and injure every other, universal peace and prosperity would be the natural outcome! A class of useless and idle superior persons consuming and wasting the wealth produced by the toilers, and calmly assuring those toilers that the more wealth is wasted the more employment will it find the poor in producing still more! A Press, ruled less by its editors than its advertisement canvassers, prating of military glory with half the Crimean veterans in the work-house! A Church preaching serenely of the religion of Jesus Christ, and voting in almost solid phalanx against every attempt at the practical realisation of Christ's doctrines! A populace singing "Britons never, never, never shall be slaves," yet not so much as daring to put their thoughts into words for fear lest they should lose their work! A great nation of shopkeepers who think God only good for one day in the seven; who attach a "property qualification" to all offices where brains and probity are most needed; who describe adulteration as "another form of competition"; who brazenly pretend that greed, vulgarity, injustice, and the degradation and disfigurement of the country and the people must be maintained for fear art and enterprise and literature and heroism should become extinct! These things we know well, and despise most utterly.

Well do we know the hero beloved of Brixton and Whalley Range Respectability, the "successful" man, the man who "rose from the people by his own efforts," the man who "got on." The Socialist Party will have none of him. The Socialist Party scoffs at and derides the cult of gig-respectability and successful calico-sizing; will pay no honour to selfishness, howsoever successful. Will dignify no self-

made men; will erect no statues to Hudson, or Arkwright, or Jay Gould, or Masham. Will rather honour the giver than the getter, rather love the man-helper than the self-helper; will put the names of John Ruskin, Thomas Carlyle, Walt Whitman, and Erasmus Darwin above those of all the money-spinners, fame-winners, blood-shedders, and self-makers that ever encumbered the earth.

The Socialist Party will not aspire to the huckster's heaven of financial success, nor deliver up its soul to escape the huckster's hell of financial failure. The Socialist Party knows that "money never yet paid one man for service to another." It will not value love, duty, or devotion in stolen doubloons like a buccaneer, nor in scalps like a Choctaw Indian. It will spurn self-interest and crown self-sacrifice. It will ask not what a man has got, but what he has given. It will not be led by the Bishop of Manchester to give a judge a large salary for fear he should betray his trust for bribes. It will not reward its Rorke's Drift heroes by a present of a pair of regulation trousers. It will not be imbecile enough to suppose that Miltons, Stephensons, Turners, Harveys, Herschells, Darwins, Ruskins, and Florence Nightingales are to be bought in the market at current rates, and that when the supply falls below the demand, nothing is necessary but to bid higher. It will regard a man's talent as it regards the earth and sea, as the gift of God, to be used by all for the good of all. It will answer the mere commercial hero's demand for more wages: "Strong men and clever men were not sent here to enslave and plunder their weaker fellow-creatures, but to *serve* them. It is the duty of the young to wait upon the old, of the hale to nurse the sick, of the chaste to succour the frail. It is the general's prerogative to go first into danger, the captain's to be the last to leave the sinking ship. The proudest motto the proudest man can take is *Ich Dien*, 'I serve.'"

Contrast the new religion with the old. The old religion obeys half the command: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and thy

neighbour as thyself." It stops short before it comes to its neighbour. The new religion begins at its neighbour, though it does not necessarily end there. In place of Anglicism with its gentility, Romanism with its pomp and circumstance, and Calvinism with its fire and brimstone, it gives us a charity which "beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things" of *men*, and endureth all things *for men*. It gives us a charity as broad, as sweet, as merciful as Whitman's "profound lesson of reception, nor preference, nor denial," whereby "the black with his woolly head, the felon, the diseased, the illiterate person are not denied . . . none but are accepted, none but shall be dear." It gives us a hope which will not be satisfied with a "gentleman God," nor daunted by the terrors of a white-washed devil and a burnt-out hell. It tells us that while a single English child is hungry or ignorant, a single English woman disgraced and cast out as unclean, a single Englishman denied the work he asks for, or deprived of the light he needs, or the love he desires, or the honour he deserves, there shall be no money for the conversion of the heathen abroad, nor the decoration of cathedrals at home. It tells us, in the words of Ruskin, "Whether there be one God or three, no God or ten thousand, children should be fed and their bodies should be kept clean." It tells us, in the words of Christ, "Inasmuch as ye have not done it unto one of the least of these, ye have not done it unto me." It will hearken to no platitudes about holiness from priests who do not pay trade union prices. As I have said elsewhere :

While women are weeping and children starving; while industrious men and women are herding like beasts in filthy and fever-haunted hovels, to build art galleries and churches, town halls and colleges, is like putting on a muslin shirt over a filthy skin, a diamond crown upon a leprous head.

The religion and the culture which demand riches and blazonry while vice and misery are at their side are like painted harlots, hiding their

debaucheries with rouge and their shame with satin and spices.

The cant and affectation of piety and culture which lisp sentiment and chant hymns in drawing-rooms and chapels while flesh and blood are perishing in the streets, and while the souls of our sisters creep shuddering to hell—this religion and this culture, these maudlin, sickening things, with their poems and sonatas, their chants and benedictions, are things false and vain and nothing else but *lies*.

There can be no true culture, there can be no true art, there can be no true progress, there can be no true religion without sincerity. I have seen in Manchester a noble picture of Greek women at the fountain, hung up to instil into the minds of the citizens of that sordid, sooty, vulgar, and hideous town a love of beauty, and outside the art gallery I have seen a grey-headed old English woman staggering along, bent double under a sack of cinders.

When the Ship Canal, through mismanagement, was in financial straits, the Manchester city fathers advanced a loan of some two millions—of the ratepayers' money—because the "honour of the city was involved." Two or three years before that, when attention was called to the fact that the Manchester slums were the largest, the foulest, and the most deadly in all England, those same city fathers were afraid to incur the expense of demolishing and rebuilding them. There was much talk then of the burdens of the ratepayers, but not one word about the honour of the city. The honour of the city, it seems, is not concerned with the lives of its people.

Manchester is called a great city. It has a great population, a costly and hideous town-hall, a high death-rate, and a Lord Mayor. But in the eyes of the Socialist Party Manchester is in nowise great.

A great city is that which has the greatest men and women.

If it be a few ragged huts, it is still the greatest city in the whole world.

The place where a great city stands is not the

place of stretched wharves, docks, manufactures, deposits of produce merely.

Nor the place of ceaseless salutes of newcomers, or the anchor-lifters of the departing.

Nor the place of the tallest and costliest buildings, or shops selling goods from the rest of the earth.

Nor the place of the best libraries and schools, nor the place where money is plentiest.

Nor the place of the most numerous population.

Where the city stands with the brawniest breed of orators and bards.

Where the city stands that is beloved by these, and loves them in return, and understands them.

Where no monuments exist to heroes but in the common words and deeds.

Where thrift is in its place, and prudence is in its place.

Where the men and women think lightly of the laws.

Where the slave ceases, and the master of slaves ceases.

Where the populace rise at once against the never-ending audacity of elected persons.

Where fierce men and women pour forth as the sea to the whistle of death pours its sweeping and unrippled waves.

Where outside authority enters always after the precedence of inside authority.

Where the citizen is always the head and ideal, and president, mayor, governor, and what not are agents for pay.

Where children are taught to be lords to themselves, and to depend on themselves.

Where equanimity is illustrated in affairs.

Where speculations on the soul are encouraged.

Where women walk in public processions in the streets the same as the men.

Where they enter the public assembly, and take places the same as the men.

Where the city of the faithfulest friends stands.

Where the city of the cleanliness of the sexes stands.

Where the city of the healthiest fathers stands.
Where the city of the best-bodied mothers
stands.
There the great city stands.

And Manchester does not stand there, nor does any city in England, for great cities we have none.

A gulf parts the masses from the classes. This gulf is the gulf of ignorance, and only knowledge can bridge it. It is astounding, the utter ignorance of the lives of the poor, the complete misapprehension of their conditions, their trials, their hopes, and their ideals, which the rich manifest in their words and deeds. For some years past I have been engaged in helping to make and to preach our new religion. Yet, not long ago, a well-meaning clergyman of Liberal views, who had just read one of my books, came to see me, and asked, "Who is it you are writing for? What is it you complain of? Are you thinking of the residuum—the submerged tenth?"

This from a clergyman, a man professing great interest in the workers, a man who sat at the time he spoke within a stone's-throw of the Manchester slums.

He thought the workers, except the idle and incapable, were pretty well off, and that poverty would cure itself. He held the notion, common to his class, that the question is simply one of wages. He thought the colliers and the cotton operatives had a good deal to be thankful for. Have they not a living wage?

Yes, they have a living wage. But have we forgotten the long and deadly struggles they were forced to undertake to keep that wage? And is there nothing to be given to the workers but *wages*?

Even if we accept wages as the one thing needful; even if we go as far as the man in *Our Mutual Friend*, and consider the labour question simply as "a question of so many pounds of beef and so many pints of porter," can we say that the masses have as much beef and porter as they need?

What of the wages of the tailors, the shirt-makers, the match-makers, the dockers, the sailors, the rail-

way men, the farm labourers, the lead-workers, the slipper-makers, the shop assistants, the domestic servants, the canal boat workers, the chain and nail makers, the old soldiers, the match hawkers, the feather dressers, the silk dyers, the artificial flower makers, the fishermen, the costers, the news boys? What of *all* the workers' *wives*?

But wages are not all. We have to ask how hard and how long these people work; we have to ask what their homes are like, what health they enjoy, how much rest and culture, and fresh air, and wholesome recreation they obtain.

And we find that their homes are dismal and mean, that their labour is long and hard, that they have scarcely any fresh air, or sweet rest, or pure amusements.

And we find that the death-rates are terribly high, that the duration of life is short, that the bill of health is bad. In one district of Manchester a committee of ladies found that 60 per cent. of the population were sick. In some of the slum districts, Dr. Thresh found death-rates of 75 and 90 in the thousand, as against rates of 9 and 16 in the suburbs. In some of the London "model" blocks, Mr. Williams says the death-rate is over 40 and the density over 3,000 to the acre.

Consider again the dangers, the hardships, and the sickness incidental to the work of the sailors, the fishermen, the colliers, the chemical workers, match-makers. Go amongst the cotton operatives and *see* how factory work in factory towns deteriorates the people mentally and physically.

No; it is not of the submerged tenth we are thinking only. It is of the English people. Over all is the shadow of fear—the fear of failure and the workhouse. But I could not in a volume so much as enumerate all the evils of our present English civilisation. There is a whole library of Blue-books filled with the statistics and the evidence of the hardships and labours and sufferings of those who create the wealth of this rich miserable country. Not the least of the wrongs of the poor is one of which Blue-books take no cognisance, the denial to

the best brain and bone and sinew of the nation of the respect due to all men by virtue of their manhood. Our workers are honoured and loved too little; they are governed and patronised and lectured overmuch.

What, then, do we demand? We demand that national co-operation shall displace individual competition; we demand to this end the nationalisation of the land and all the instruments of production and of distribution. We demand that our industry be organised, and that production be for use and not for sale.

We demand that our agricultural resources be developed because agriculture is more pleasant and more healthy than manufactures, because in an agricultural nation the towns would be cleaner and handsomer and more wholesome, and because the destruction of our agriculture renders us dependent upon foreign countries for our food, and so exposes us to certain defeat and ruin in case of war.

At present the people of the manufacturing towns have not only ceased to possess their own country: they have ceased to know it. They never see England. They see only brick walls, chimneys, smoke, and cinder heaps. They are unable to so much as conceive the fairness and sweetness of England. They are strangers and aliens in their own land.

We say, then, give the British people their own country. But we do not stop there. We demand that they shall not only be made the free possessors of their own country, but also of their own earnings, of their own lives, of their own bodies and their own souls.

We regard work as a means and not as an end: men should work to live; they should not live to work. We demand for the people as much leisure, as full and sweet and noble a life, as the world can give. We want labour to have its own; not merely the price of its sweat, but its due meed of love and honour. In our eyes the lifeboat-man is a hero, and the African machine-gun soldier "opening up new markets" is a brigand and assassin. In our eyes the skilled craftsman or farmer is a man of learning,

and the Greek-crammed pedant is a dunce. In our eyes an apple orchard is more beautiful and precious than a ducal palace. In our eyes the worth of a nation depends on the worthiness of its people's lives, and not upon the balance at the national bank. We want a religion of justice and charity and love. We do not want pious cant on Sundays and chicanery and lust all the rest of the week. We want a God who is fit for business, and a business that is worthy of God. We want the code of private honour and the bonds of domestic love carried into all our public affairs. We want a realisation, in fact, of the brotherhood we hear so much about in theory. Because we know the meaning of heredity and environment, because we believe that men are what their surroundings make them, we want justice for all, love for all, mercy for all.

We are the party of humanity. Our religion is the religion of humanity. "The black with his woolly head, the felon, the diseased, the illiterate are not denied." The thief on the cross, the Magdalen at the well, are our brother and our sister; bone of our bone, flesh of our flesh. If you persecute these, if you insult them, if you rob them, you rob and persecute and insult us. Without the love, and the counsel, and the aid of our fellow-creatures, the best of us were savages—little more than brutes. What we are they made us; what we know they taught us; what we have they gave us: we are theirs, and they are ours, and for them we speak and write, with all the power God gave us.

For me, I am of the people, and I know them. I know them to be capable of the best. I speak for them in the words of Milton:

Lords and Commons of England, consider what nation it is whereof ye are, and whereof ye are the governors; a nation not slow and dull, but of a quick, ingenious, and piercing spirit; acute to invent, subtle and sinewy to discourse, not beneath the reach of any point, the highest that human capacity can soar to.

I speak for them in the words of Christ:

Inasmuch as ye have not done it unto one of the least of these, ye have not done it unto me.

I speak for them of my own knowledge, for the brave and clever and good people who have been so kind and so faithful and so affectionate to me; and I say that they are so capable and so worthy that the greatest men and noblest women of our time are only indications of the height which the masses may reach and surpass.

Just as by cultivation the acrid wild crab has been developed into the beautiful and luscious apple may the unripe, ill-fed, neglected wild fruits of the fields and slums be developed into pure and noble and beautiful men and women.

And the means to this end are justice and freedom, and peace and culture, and love and honour from man to man.

Some day, near or far, "the slave shall cease and the master of slaves shall cease," the hideous mirk and squalor of our modern cities shall be swept away, and in the flower-starred meadows, under the sweet blue northern sky, the men and the maids of merrie England shall dance and sing, and "think lightly of the laws."

God bless them, say I, these our children. We shall rest none the less peacefully under their glancing feet because we have helped to make them happy.

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In October, 1894, the CLARION published the same book, uniform in size and type with the shilling edition, at the low price of ONE PENNY. As the book contained 206 pages, and was printed by trade-union labour, and on British-made paper, it could only be produced at a loss. This loss was borne by the proprietors of the CLARION.

The sale of the penny edition outran all expectations. No one supposed that more than 100,000 would be called for, but in a few months over 700,000 had been sold, without a penny being spent in advertisement, and in face of the tremendous opposition excited by Socialistic publications in those days.

Later on an edition was published at 3d., and the total sale reached nearly a million copies.

An American edition is said to have sold equally well, and the book was translated into Welsh, Dutch, German, Scandinavian, Spanish, and other languages; on none of which editions, it may be remarked, did the author receive any royalties.

The British edition has been out of print for some years, and there has recently been a growing demand for the book's re-issue. To this the author at length reluctantly acceded, and the present edition was announced. That the demand was real may be judged from the fact that orders for 20,000 copies were placed before the date of publication, and the new issue promises to sell as well as the first threepenny edition.

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